

The Greater Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce once claimed on its website that "Caliente was one of the favorite writing spots for western novelist Zane Grey. . . . It was also where the famed 'Robber's Roost', hideout for outlaws like Butch Cassidy, is located."

Whoa, pardner! Some history homework was needed here. Just because these claims were posted on a website for the world to read doesn't make them true.

I e-mailed one of Grey's biographers, a colleague of mine, and asked if Grey had spent time in Caliente, drawing inspiration in the rustic railroad town located in southeastern Nevada for some of his writings. "He did not," was the biographer's response. "I believe that there was a story of him staying there for awhile and actually writing a novel there. However, I believe he had been confused with another western writer. Yes, I've seen the claim. There is nothing supporting that in his correspondence."

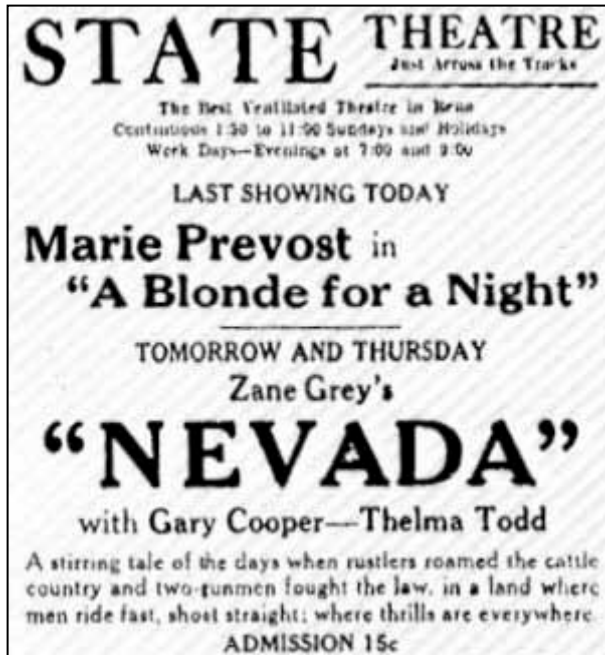
Grey wrote a novel named *Nevada*, which first appeared in monthly installments beginning in the November 1926 issue of *The American Magazine*. A silent movie starring the up-and coming Gary Cooper as "Nevada," Thelma Todd, and William Powell opened throughout the country the next year. The film was advertised as "a stirring tale of the days when rustlers roamed the cattle country and two gunmen fought the law, in a land where men ride fast, shoot straight; where thrills are everywhere." On July 4, 1927 one could pay fifteen cents and watch the movie *Nevada* at the State Theatre in Reno. However, there is no evidence that Grey spent anytime in Caliente writing *Nevada* or any other book.

Grey, seven years prior to his death in Altadena, California, also wrote a novel entitled *Robber's Roost* (1932). The following year a movie was released by the same name starring cowboy actor George O'Brien and Maureen O'Sullivan (who also starred with Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan's Jane).

So where was Robber's Roost? Utahans take great pride that Robber's Roost was located in Utah's "Outback." A haven for outlaws such as Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch, Jeffrey D. Nichols tells us in *History Blazer* (August 1995) that Robber's Roost was "a wild stretch of land crisscrossed with steep-walled canyons and hidden draws . . . between the Colorado, Green, and Dirty Devil Rivers" in southeastern Utah. As the crow flies, Caliente is more than 200 miles to the west.

According to Nichols, "Robber's Roost was one of several hideouts along what became known as the Outlaw Trail. The Roost was never successfully penetrated by the





authorities, despite some sporadic attempts and many boastful claims by various officials. The Roost was largely abandoned as an outlaw hangout after 1902 when Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid reportedly departed on their fateful South American trip."

Actor Robert Redford, who played Sundance in the famous film, wrote a 1978 book, *The Outlaw Trail*, dealing in part with Robber's Roost in his home state of Utah.

When promoting tourism and history, something seems to happen where fancy and fiction overtake reality. The truth threshold for marketing a historical location is generally low and the entertainment value is deemed most important; after all, they're only tourists. In the end, beware what passes for history, particularly on a website.

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